



Greater Hartford Legal Aid

**Testimony of Susan Garten
Greater Hartford Legal Aid
In Support of Restoring the State Medical Assistance for Non-Citizens Program**

In July 2011, about 4,500 adult immigrants who entered the country legally but have lived here for less than five years, lost health care coverage. Most of these are the parents of children in HUSKY. The rest are elderly, blind or disabled.

These immigrants will become eligible for federal Medicaid after they have been lawful permanent residents for five years. In 1997, the Connecticut General Assembly voted to fill that five-year gap by providing health coverage to recent legal immigrants through the State Medical Assistance for Non-Citizens (SMANC) program. In 2009, the legislature abolished the SMANC program for budgetary reasons, and a recent state court decision cut off medical coverage for these needy adults.

But it would be financially prudent to reinstate time-limited medical coverage for recent legal immigrants:

Eliminating coverage does not eliminate costs. A 2009 Connecticut Health Foundation Policy Brief reports that low-income immigrants without access to a public health care program are often uninsured. But they still need health care.

People without insurance tend to seek health care from programs that the state supports, including community health centers and hospital emergency rooms.

Without health insurance, people may also delay getting care while their condition worsens. This will result in higher health care costs when treatment is finally obtained.

Also, immigrants and their families contribute to our society in many ways, including paying income and sales taxes at the same rates as citizens. They defend our country by serving in the military. When they fall on hard times and need medical assistance that they cannot afford, they should have access to the same public programs as other taxpayers.

Please restore this valuable program that serves as a temporary bridge to federal Medicaid eligibility for legal immigrants.

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